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AN ACTS MOTIF IN THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP:
EXEGESIS AND APPLICATION OF ACTS 14:8-20

A Dissertation

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the Faculty of the School of Theology
at Claremont

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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by

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This dissertation, written by

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of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation consists of a threefold discussion of Acts 14:8-20: the delightful account of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra. First, we present an exegesis of this ancient legend, in which we discuss not only the critical issues faced in the text, but also the intention of the story. This latter section culminates in an interpretation, suggesting a focus for contemporary preaching. The second chapter extends our discussion by providing a contemporary theological context appropriate both to the development of the biblical passage and of the sermon. For this purpose, we have selected the important elements from the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr. It is our thesis that his theology provides a natural bridge from the passage of scripture to the context for the sermon. Further, we find his theology of particular help in the formulation of our own position, especially his emphasis on the greatness of God as the starting point for theology and ethics. Finally, we turn to the practical interpretation of the biblical text, in which a sermon is offered as a further interpretation of the various perspectives discussed in the paper. Naturally, this sermon has been placed in a worship setting. At the close of the dissertation, a brief conclusion has been included as a reflective evaluation of the results of our investigation.

CHAPTER II

EXEGESIS OF ACTS 14:8-20

The account of the missionary activity of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra is one example of the propagation of the Christian message to a purely pagan audience. In Acts, Luke has provided us with only two such examples, the other being Paul's speech before the populace of Athens in Acts 17:16-34. However, the primary difference between the two situations is clear. The speech on the Areopagus is designed for a learned audience familiar with the common philosophies of the day and presents a typical, early Christian missionary encounter with the Stoics and Epicureans in particular. Although there are several similarities between the two incidents, as pointed out below, the one in Athens proceeds on a highly sophisticated plane. There Paul appeals more to reason and knowledge, than experience, as he unfolds his new teaching.

The incident at Lystra, however, has been designed by Luke to represent a typical, early Christian missionary encounter with the uneducated pagan, who is familiar only with the cultic worship of wonder-working gods, such as Zeus and Hermes. Here Paul is confronted by the common pagan man who can believe the objective proof of experience but who places little value on the powers of reason. The environment of this small community, located on the outskirts of

civilization and at the edge of the Roman empire, has been made by Luke to be the setting of a typical situation faced by the early Christian missionary. He portrays the communication of the Christian message to the uneducated pagan as primarily experiential. Thus, Paul performs a miracle so that they may see the results of faith. Even his short speech is directed to their everyday knowledge of nature, now presented to them as the experience of the living God. This legend shows clearly the way in which the early Christian missionary encountered the temptation of self-glorification, and how his faith demanded the rejection of god-status. Further, it reflects the way in which he was able to utilize prevailing cultic religious belief even of a perverted type, purify it, and then make it the foundation of the gospel message.

TRANSLATION¹

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and walked. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes. And the

¹The text of the Revised Standard Version has been selected as the finest, literal translation. Problems with this translation and of a text critical nature are discussed in the exegetical analysis.

priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying, "Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Paul and Barnabas, having gained knowledge at Iconium that an attempt to molest and stone them was in progress, have fled to Lycaonia and are preaching the gospel throughout the country. In Acts 14:6 Luke already has placed the two apostles in both Lystra and Derbe, an effective introduction for the material which follows in 14:8-23.

Verse Eight.

Luke emphasizes the nature, length, and severity of the illness which has afflicted the man-about-to-be-cured. He describes his condition as ἀσύνατος . . . τοῖς ποσὶν: this man is unable to use

his feet. (This is the only time in New Testament literature where ἀσθενάτος is used in a physical sense to denote malady.)² The length of the illness is accented by the next phrase, Χωρὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ. Although the exact length of the illness is not specified,³ we learn that the man's paralysis has been from birth and is not to be understood as a direct result of some "sin" which he has committed during his life. Finally, Luke stresses the severity of his condition by including a third phrase, ὃς οὐδέποτε περιπατήσεν: this man has never walked. Again Luke emphasizes that he has been crippled from birth. This clearness concerning the man's affliction and the triple-beat emphasis of the verse is without parallel in New Testament literature; it serves to convince the reader of the reality both of the man's trouble and of his cure.

In this verse we notice also the anonymity of the man-about-to-be-cured. Nowhere is the τις ἀνὴρ named. Further, we are told neither the exact location of the place where he has been sitting, nor the spot from which he has been healed.⁴ This is a common characteristic of miracle stories in general, as evidenced elsewhere in

²Cf. Romans 15:1, where it refers to spiritual weakness.

³Cf. John 5:5, where the man has been ill for thirty-eight years.

⁴Cf. Acts 3:2, where the situation is explicit.

Lucan literature.⁵

The inclusion of the name of the city in which the miracle is performed is another unusual element. The phrase, ἐν Λύστροις, appears to have been inserted by Luke to compensate for his failure to provide a more specific introductory statement than Acts 14:6-7. Here we expect a statement preceding the miracle to set the situation. Instead, we clearly have an insertion occurring in an awkward position which interrupts the grammatical thought. Thus, this incident may not have taken place in Lystra, although it must be placed in Lycaonia.⁶

The statement, καὶ τις ἀνὴρ . . . χηλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, exactly parallels the condition of the man about to be cured by Peter in Acts 3:2. However, we should not mistake the similarity in the length and nature of the illness as a suggestion of the dependence of one story on the other. Nor should we conclude as Wilcox, who is investigating the possibility of semitisms, that the author of Acts was well acquainted with particular passages of the Septuagint:

⁵Cf. Luke 8:27 and 9:38 as two examples of anonymity in connection with a healing miracle.

⁶This is confirmed not only by verse eleven (which could be an insertion also), but also by the legend of Baucis and Philemon discussed below.

We are inclined to discern the origin of this phrase in Acts in the influence upon its writer . . . of the particular passages in question. In view of the type of passage involved, the medium of this influence may have been the liturgical or apologetic activity of the church.⁷

Rather, we should observe first that this phrase is not unusual for a healing miracle, and second that Luke deliberately parallels Peter and Paul by including similar stories (although this is not Luke's primary motive for including either story). Finally, we should observe the healing of the lame as a part of the messianic tradition fulfilling Isaiah 35:6: τοτε ἀναταί ὡς ἑταρος υἱός, a tradition which is carried out by Paul as the work of an apostle. In this way only could the phraseology of the Septuagint have influenced the present wording.

Bruce, in particular, has pointed out the heteroclite declension behind ἐν λύστοις.⁸ But little needs to be made of this point since its usage is consistent in Acts⁹ and may be accounted for easily. As Mellink has correctly shown, the irregularity is a product of its transposition from Lycaonian into Greek.

⁷Max Wilcox, The Semitisms of Acts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 62. Cf. Judges 16:17 (A); Psalm 21 (22):11; Isaiah 49:1; and Psalm 70 (71):6.

⁸F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles (London: Tyndale Press, 1952), p. 280.

⁹Cf. Acts 14:6, 21; 16:1f; 27:5; and 2 Timothy 3:11.

The name of Lystra presumably goes back to prehistoric times and can be attributed to the Lycaonian language. The uncertainty of its gender in Greek emphasizes the non-Greek character of the name.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Lystra has never been excavated. As a result there are no archaeological evidences to support what information we have about it.

Verse Nine.

We are told that the man-about-to-be-cured hears Paul speaking. Although Luke has not chosen to report a speech of Paul at this point in the narrative, the results which follow show that he was preaching the gospel. Apparently, there was no synagogue at Lystra,¹¹ for Paul is preaching to the crowd in the open air. Paul then fixes his eyes upon the man and sees that he has faith necessary to be healed. Here again we encounter one of Luke's favorite words, ἀτενίσας, which denotes a peculiar kind of attentive look.¹² Although it too occurs at Acts 3:4, it does not always occur in connection

¹⁰M. J. Mellink, "Lystra," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, p. 194.

¹¹Ernst Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), p. 425. This is confirmed by verse nineteen.

¹²Twelve of the fourteen New Testament occurrences are Lucan.

with a healing.

The phrase, πίστιν τῷ σωθῆναι, shows what has happened to the man because of Paul's proclamation; it is also the only requirement for the healing which follows. The element of faith is regularly emphasized as a condition of receiving both physical and spiritual healing not only in Acts but also in the Gospels.¹³ σωθῆναι in this context means "to be healed" or "saved from disease" and should be taken in the physical sense. However, the readers of Acts can hardly have been unaware of its wider implications, for σωτηρία¹⁴ was a contemporary term used by both the Gentiles and the Jews. Salvation was the object of vows and prayers used by the initiates of the various mystery cults, giving it a variety of meanings: Thus,

Paul preached to those who already were ignorantly seeking what he offered; . . . he caught up the term Salvation . . . from them, put his own meaning . . . into it, and then gave it back to them. . . . in the dedications and vows the word sometimes appears to mean little more than health, or prosperity or good fortune, or a union of all three. Yet the word never wholly excludes a meaning that comes nearer to reality and permanence: there lies latent in it some undefined and hardly conscious thought of the spiritual and the moral, which made it suit Paul's purpose admirably.¹⁵

¹³Cf. Mark 9:23; Acts 3:16; Luke 5:20; 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42.

¹⁴Bruce, p. 316.

¹⁵W. M. Ramsay, The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), pp. 94-95.

Verse Ten.

Paul now commands the crippled man to "stand upright on his feet," and, having obeyed him, he begins to walk about: Paul has healed the cripple. This language also is similar to Acts 3:8, for the reasons discussed above.

We observe that Paul speaks in a loud voice: μεγαλῇ φωνῇ. This is clearly the language of Luke,¹⁶ who has drawn on typical miracle story language for this phrase. In a Christian context it implies that Paul was empowered by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ The command itself finds a direct parallel in the Septuagint reading of 4 Kingdoms 13:21: ἀνέστη ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ. There the author tells the story of a dead man, who came back to life and rose to his feet while being buried. It seems that the body had been thrown hurriedly into the grave of Elisha by raiders, and the miraculous result came about when the dead man's body touched the bones of the prophet. In Luke's account of the healing, it makes no sense to suggest that either the pagan man or his audience attached special significance to these words, for the pagans of Lystra could hardly have been aware of the tradition behind the statement. But the readers of Acts who had a

¹⁶ Cf. 7:57; 60; 8:7; 14:10; 16:28; 26:24; Luke 4:33; 8:28; 17:15; 19:37; 23:23; 23:46 for Luke's preference for this phrase.

¹⁷ Haenchen, p. 425.

knowledge of the Christian tradition would have seen quickly the significance of being raised from death to life. Such an understanding clearly enriches the interpretation of this passage, and it seems likely that Luke's choice of words is deliberate. Furthermore, in Acts 26:16 this statement from 4 Kingdoms occurs again. There the words are spoken by Jesus to a blind Saul on the road to Damascus and are also symbolic of the change resulting from a conversion experience. We may conclude, then, that the Elisha statement was utilized in Christian tradition as a way of expressing conversion. Wilcox, who has investigated this passage for semitisms, also has concluded differently:

Its presence here may indicate that the tradition of these verba Pauli is ancient and authentic; though its use in the Targumin . . . may suggest that the corresponding Aramaic form was part of the religious phraseology of the Jewish synagogues of an early time.¹⁸

This discussion of the works' significance ought to be discounted as improbable. The phrase has been utilized by Luke, not Paul.

This verse concludes by showing the result of the miracle-working: ἤλατο καὶ περὶεπαύει. This phrase shows an immediate and remarkable recovery from the severe ailment, a typical miracle story element. Just as the man was in the worst possible shape, now he is in the best possible shape. Literary contrast is utilized to the

¹⁸Wilcox, p. 134.

fullest by Luke in the same manner as in Acts 3:8.¹⁹ In both cases Luke is emphasizing the public character of the cure and its reality.²⁰

Verse Eleven.

We are told here of the reaction of the populace to the miracle which they have witnessed. Luke uses his typical word for crowd, ὄχλοι, to denote Paul's audience. Just as Paul has seen the faith of the man who was healed, the crowd now sees what Paul has done. In the first case, we have an instance of genuine faith resulting from the hearing of the proclaimed gospel; here, however, we have the formation of a mistaken impression as the result of a sign which Paul has performed.

The crowd raises its voice speaking in the native dialect, Lycaonian. The phrase, ἐπήραν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτῶν, is typical as a crowd reaction and should be called crowd language. This should be contrasted with the previous verse where Paul speaks μακρὰν φωνήν. The inclusion of the local dialect has stimulated a considerable amount of discussion in the commentaries. Bruce suggests that Λυκαονιστὶ, which occurs only here in the New Testament, confirms those involved

¹⁹The only other occurrence in the New Testament is in John 4:14, where the meaning is different.

²⁰Here again we should note the probable influence of Isaiah 35:6. See my discussion of verse eight above.

as the native Anatolian population. As proof of this matter, he claims the language of the Roman citizens to have been Latin, a fact borne out by funerary inscriptions. He further suggests that its inclusion here is a result of two factors:

in the first place, Paul and Barnabas recognized that this was a different language from the Phrygian which they had heard on the lips of the indigenous population of Pisidian Antioch and Iconium; in the second place, the crowd's use of Lycaonian explains why Paul and Barnabas did not grasp what was afoot until the preparations to pay them divine honours were well advanced.²¹

However, it is not possible to say so neatly that the crowd was native because it had spoken Lycaonian. The Romans who lived there certainly spoke the language in order to do business. In fact, the nature of the crowd may more clearly be seen from what is said, rather than from this element. The argument of its inclusion as a result of the difference from Phrygian is of no consequence. But the third point is of considerable value. Without this stylistic inclusion, the misunderstanding, that is the fact of Paul and Barnabas being unaware of the preparations for sacrifice, would not be intelligible. We must know that the crowd spoke in a language unintelligible to Paul and Barnabas in order to understand their delayed reaction. However, whether the element was included by Luke or whether it was a part of

²¹F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), p. 291. Cf. also Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, p. 281.

an earlier tradition cannot yet be answered. The suggestions made by Munck and Macgregor²² that the populace was bilingual, understanding in Greek but reverting to the native language in the excitement of the situation, cannot be sustained. It is doubtful that the native population of Lystra knew much Greek, and as we can see from the result of the story, they clearly did not understand Paul's preaching. In fact, all we can say thus far is that there was a crowd of people who saw what Paul had done and who spoke Lycaonian.

The words of the crowd are immensely important for an understanding of this story. The apostles are proclaimed as gods, ὁ Θεὸς. We observe first that the story so far has been constructed solely around Paul. Barnabas has not been mentioned once. From this point on, however, the story has two apostles, although Barnabas is dispensable. Further, these gods are proclaimed as having become like men and having descended to the Lystrans: ὡς ἄνθρωποι

²²See Johannes Munck, The Acts of the Apostles (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), p. 131, and G. H. C. Macgregor, "The Acts of the Apostles: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), IX, p. 188. An additional problem discussed by the commentaries with regard to the language designation in the passage is the question of the language spoken by Paul and Barnabas: how did they communicate with the populace? Various theories have been offered. However, we believe that the question is insignificant. From the Lucan perspective, it is clear that the message was communicated (however one understands verse eighteen). The language barrier serves to heighten the suspense and to point out a common missionary problem for preaching.

ἀνθρώποις κατέβησαν πρὸς ἡμᾶς. We recognize this theme immediately as common to the mythology of that period as well as earlier times. There are countless legends about the gods having assumed mortal form and descending to earth incognito, and it is known that these legends were circulated widely. An important contrast thus arises: Paul and Barnabas are not the gods-become-men; Jesus Christ was the God-become-man. This verse is particularly important because it tells us a great deal about the crowd of whom Luke is writing: they are common people, pagans who hold to the old superstitious ways and who believe in the cultic religions connected with the pantheon of gods. Luke has singled out this story in Acts as the sole example of the common pagan man who was to be confronted by the early Christian missionary.²³

Verse Twelve.

Luke reports now that the pagans called Barnabas Δία and Paul Ἑρμῆν, because he was the chief speaker. (Δία, it should be noted, is a more primitive name for the Greek Zeus.) Although the commentaries here have focused on the problem of the Hellenization of the gods and have asked if the gods were really Anatolian in fact,

²³This passage is often compared to Acts 28:6, but the situations are not really similar.

that question has no answer as yet and is not of ultimate significance.²⁴ For Luke, the identification of Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes is of particular value in the context of the speech which follows, since the readers of Acts would have identified quickly from their own experience the cultic worship here ascribed. Zeus and Hermes tell the readers what local deities could never have meant in this context. Indeed, Luke has made it possible for the whole Greek-speaking world to understand this material. The choice of Zeus and Hermes may be related also to common practice: the combination of Zeus and Hermes is well-attested in the Hellenistic world, and they appear to have been worshipped jointly, as were Jupiter and Mercury.²⁵ The archaeological evidence presented by the excavations of Calder, which may be seen in Bruce, has only marginal significance, since it can be dated no earlier than the middle of the third century A. D.²⁶ Packer has taken the order of Barnabas and Paul in this passage as proof of its authenticity.²⁷ But we ought not be so

²⁴See Bruce, Commentary, p. 291, and Munck, pp. 131-132. Relevant material may also be found in Henry J. Cadbury, The Book of Acts in History (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 23, and C. S. C. Williams, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 170.

²⁵Williams, p. 171.

²⁶Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, pp. 281-282.

²⁷J. W. Packer, Acts of the Apostles (Cambridge:

misled. The order at this point is of no particular significance and may be no more than a direct result of the normal combination, Zeus and Hermes.²⁸ Zeus, who was the chief god in the Greek pantheon, takes logical precedence over Hermes. With respect to this point, the legend of Baucis and Philemon from Ovid's Metamorphoses is often cited as a parallel. Although Ovid had completed his work in Latin by 8 A. D., it is more probable that Luke might have known the Greek model for this story. But even if that is the case, it is evidence only for the combination of Zeus and Hermes at an early date in that region (Phrygia) and their descent to earth in mortal garb. All we can say for certain is that it is likely the story was associated with the cult of the temple mentioned there. Although the points of the two stories are considerably different, as well as the plot, it is most probable that the two have a similar setting in life: they both have arisen to explain the origin of a particular cult in a given locality. The Baucis and Philemon legend tells of the origin of a particular Zeus-Hermes cult in Phrygia, and the Paul-Barnabas episode explains the church at Lystra.²⁹

University Press, 1966), p. 117.

²⁸See Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury (eds.) The Beginnings of Christianity (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), Part I:IV, p. 164.

²⁹For a translation of Baucis and Philemon, see Ovid, The

The phrase, ὁ ἡγούμενος τοῦ λόγου, as applied to Paul is of particular importance. It is not only a good description of the usual role of Hermes, but also explains Paul's function in Acts as the leader of speaking. O'Neill's comments on this point are particularly appropriate:

The title "leader in speaking" is a good description of Paul's status in Acts as a whole, besides having another sense which the readers of Acts would quickly see: leading exponent of the Word of God.³⁰

This evidence, however cannot be extended further by citing the phrase from Iamblichus,

Θεὸς ὁ τῶν λόγων ἡγεμὼν Ἑλλην.

which dates from the third century.³¹

Verse Thirteen.

The priest of the local Zeus cult, who has brought bulls and garlands, wishes to sacrifice with the crowd at the city gates. The exact meaning of τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ οὐτοῦ πρὸ τῆς πόλεως (the Zeus who was in front of the city) is not clear, but evidence tends to

Metamorphoses (New York: New American Library, 1958), pp. 234-238.

³⁰J. C. O'Neill, The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting (London: S. P. C. K., 1961), p. 151.

³¹Hermes Trismegistus, Hermetica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), IV, p. 28.

support the idea that it refers to a temple located without the city of gates.³² It was not uncommon for temples to be so located.

Haenchen, who follows this notion, reconciles the details of this verse by the assumption

that the temple of Zeus stood hard by the city gates, and the altar in front of the temple--sacrifices were not offered just anywhere.³³

However, Ramsay has suggested another popular interpretation of this phrase:

At Claudiopropolis of Isauria . . . an inscription in the wall of the mediaeval castle records a dedication to Jupiter-before-the-town (Διὶ προσοτίῳ).³⁴

The priest has brought oxen (ταύρους) and garlands (στεύματα) for the sacrifice to be undertaken by all the people of Lystra. Although this sacrifice is a typical element of the pagan cultic rites and, therefore, sheds no particular knowledge about the cult, the point being made by Luke is clear. As a result of Paul's preaching the good news and the salvation of the cripple, the local priest and his people (and their gods) pay homage to Christianity. In a sense this is the point of the entire legend: to show the inferior

³²Inscriptiones Insularum Maris Aegaei (Berlin: Reimer, 1898), XII, Fasc. III, items 420, 522.

³³Haenchen, p. 427.

³⁴W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire before A. D. 170 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 51.

local cult with its ancient mythologies and superstitions now transplanted by the Christian message. But in these assumptions we dare not go too far. The story is directed against such idolatry, but not against a god-become-man. The notion of Paul and Barnabas as such is refuted, so that the true God, who was incarnate in Jesus Christ, may be recognized as the one to be worshipped.

The sacrifice is to take place at the gates (πυλῶνας). This could mean the city or the temple or some other gates. Haenchen's assumption is as warranted as any, but also as uncertain. We cannot tell from the text, however, what gates are meant, nor can any evidence be assembled from Lukan or New Testament usage to support any particular theory.

Verse Fourteen.

The climax of the narrative is reached when Paul and Barnabas, who until now have been unaware of the preparations for sacrifice and their intention, learn what is going on. Whether Paul and Barnabas were located so that they could not see the preparations, or if the intention is to say that they have just learned the purpose of the misunderstanding crowd, can not be said. But it is certain that the local populace has been conversing in their native tongue, and that that is the source of confusion. In any event, Paul and Barnabas "hear" of these things and rend their garments and rush out into the

crowd to correct the misunderstanding: to point out the true God, who is to be sacrificed to.

We observe immediately that Luke calls Paul and Barnabas οἱ ἀπόστολοι. This is unusual, for elsewhere he uses it only to denote the twelve. However, in general, it seems to have been applied variously, and here the tradition may pre-date Luke.

The rending of clothing (σπαρύναντες τὰ ἑαυτῶν) was a common Jewish practice, generally denoting an attitude of horror at particularly offensive events.³⁵ Although this reaction was prescribed for blasphemy, Cadbury has pointed out a wider usage as evidenced by the Septuagint:

The rending of garments in Jewish literature is by no means limited to cases of blasphemy. It occurs in many passages of the Old Testament of sorrow, especially of painful surprise . . . it may be regarded as an act of protestation. And it would seem that this, rather than horror at blasphemy, was the meaning of the apostles' gesture at Lystra.³⁶

Cadbury's point is questionable, for clearly it is intended to show their surprise or horror at the proceedings, which were prepared to honor them as gods. There is a remarkable parallel to this passage in Judith 14:16-19, where the reaction is one of horror (but not to blasphemy). In fact, Luke may have drawn his language from this

³⁵Cf. Mark 14:63; Acts 18:6; 22:22-23; Matt. 26:65.

³⁶Henry J. Cadbury, "Dust and Garments," in Lake and Cadbury, V, pp. 171-172. Cf. Jeremiah 36:24 and Numbers 14:6.

parallel.

Curiously, we are told that the apostles rushed out (ἐξῆλθον) into the crowd. From where? Ricciotti believes that the verb implies they were in an enclosed place,³⁷ but there is no evidence for this in the text. Further, if they have been in the open air, as assumed above, then it would mean only that they rushed into the crowd. On this point, we cannot reach a final accord.

Verse Fifteen.

Here begins a missionary speech, a typical device used by Luke to summarize the gospel. In each setting in Acts, the speech is related to the situation and the local inhabitants, and serves as an instructive for Christian missionaries. In other words, when encountered by an uneducated pagan audience, this is how to begin the preaching. To begin with, then, Paul and Barnabas put down the attempt to make a sacrifice to them as gods by pointing out that they are men just like the men of the crowd. Having corrected this mistake, they go on to call for the people to turn from their idol worship to the one, living God, who made all of creation. Although the speech seems to be given by Paul and Barnabas simultaneously, undoubtedly

³⁷Giuseppe Ricciotti, The Acts of the Apostles (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1958), p. 223.

we are to understand that Paul is the speaker. This is confirmed by verse twelve.

The speech begins with Luke's characteristic form of address, ἄνδρες, and proceeds to ask a rhetorical question: τί ταῦτα ποιεῖτε. Since Paul and Barnabas now know the purpose of the crowd's activity, the question acts as a command to stop these activities. The reason for this is given next: ἡμεῖς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἔσμεν ὑμῖν ἄνθρωποι.³⁸ The mistaken impression of the crowd is corrected by denying that they are Zeus and Hermes. This language is typically Lucan, for Peter (in Acts 10:26) eschews self-worship with the same language.³⁹ Thus, we see an obvious problem of the early Christian missionaries: when they worked wonders among the common people, there was a tendency to set them up as objects of worship. Undoubtedly, a part of the Lucan purposes in both of these cases has been to contrast Christianity with other wonder-working cults, whose leaders allowed themselves to be proclaimed as gods.

Paul turns from this matter to the proclamation (this is made clear by the technical term, εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, which indicates that

³⁸Cf. The use of this term in Wisdom 7:3; 4 Maccabees 12:13 and James 5:17. Phillipians 2:6 represents a striking parallel.

³⁹Cf. also Revelation 19:10 and 22:9.

the gospel is to be preached). He begins by calling for repentance in a special sense: a turn from τούτων τῶν ματαίων to θεὸν ζῶντα. Although ματαίων may be used in a general sense to mean vain or foolish acts, the more explicit translation "idols," seems to fit this occasion exactly. Of particular significance here is that the turning is to be to the living God. This phrase is without parallel in the Lucan writings, but occurs frequently in our literature. However, 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is an important parallel from the letters of Paul:

ἔπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδωλῶν δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ.

We have there a basic correspondence not only in theology, but also in context, for Paul is describing their conversion as a result of his preaching. However, we cannot fail to note Paul's choice of words for idols, εἰδωλῶν, which differs from Luke's choice. The agreement here is very general.

God is described as the author of all creation: ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς. Ultimately, this description is drawn from Exodus 20:11; however, it also occurs frequently in the Septuagint,⁴⁰ and is probably drawn from typical language. Luke repeats this description again in the Areopagus speech at Acts 17:24, and the arguments in both

⁴⁰Cf. also Neh. 9:6 (2 Esdras 19:6); Psalm 146 (145):6; Isaiah 42:5; and Wisdom 13:3, 4, 9.

cases are the same. In this verse, the statement provides a foundation for reconciling a purified pagan cult with the Christian religion. Further, the appeal of the speech is made through natural revelation, being the knowledge of God which the inhabitants already are well aware of, and may be considered the typical modus operandi for the Christian missionary preaching in this situation.

To Jews the Gospel proclaims 'Jesus is the Christ'; to Gentiles it begins by saying, 'God is one (cf. Dt. vi. 4), and has not left Himself without witness'.⁴¹

As Gärtner has pointed out, it is probable that this element was consistently present when preaching was directed to the common pagan:

The reference to creation and its attestation of God was probably an integral part of the oldest Christian missionary preaching: here the Gentile and the Christian could meet on common ground and human experiences could be used in illustration.⁴²

For example, Paul uses a similar argument in the opening chapters of Romans.⁴³

Verse Sixteen.

Paul and Barnabas continue their witness to the living God by showing why he has not interceded with the Gentiles before: in times

⁴¹Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, p. 283.

⁴²Bertil Gärtner, The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksells, 1955), p. 81.

⁴³Particularly 1:19 ff., 2:14 f.

past he has allowed the Gentiles to go their own ways. ἐν ταῖς προσηυχέναις γενεαῖς should be compared with Romans 16:25, (Χρόναις αἰωνίοις), where the secret of Jesus Christ has been kept hidden for long ages, and Ephesians 3:5, (ἐτεροῖς γενεαῖς), where the mystery of Christ had not been made known in the past. This language for times of ignorance is typical.

The notion (of Luke's) that God has allowed all the heathen (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) to follow their own devices (ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν) must be contrasted with Paul's own theology in Romans 1:18ff. and 3:25. We notice the obvious difference between the two. In Acts the point is that until the full revelation (of Jesus Christ) was made to the Gentiles, God excused the errors of the pagan. Being without revelation, they were not penalized for their ignorance. But in the epistle, Paul states that God simply gave up the pagans to their own devices as a penalty for their rejection of what light had been made available to them.⁴⁴ In Paul, such ignorance is no excuse. This point shows Luke's hand at work in the shaping of the theology of Paul in Acts. The universal applicability of the point can be seen in the fact that Luke here calls attention to all pagans. Thus, the early Christian missionary could take this speech into any pagan Gentile situation. In fact, Luke is using the same argument at Acts 17:30. The

⁴⁴Bruce, Acts of the Apostles, p. 283.

inclusion of ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτῶν probably means their religious ways, and to the reader of Acts would be understood in contrast to the true way.

Verse Seventeen.

Paul and Barnabas conclude their speech by stating how God has made himself manifest throughout their past, even though the Gentiles were unaware of his activity. They identify the God of natural creation as their common ground and appeal to primitive natural revelation, the heart of the fertility cults, as the action of the one, living God. First, they state that God has not left himself without witness, (οὐκ ἀμαρτύρον), for he has been doing good things, (ἀγαθοεργῶν), for them all along; he has given rains from heaven (οὐρανόθεν . . . ὑετοῦς) and fruitful seasons (καιροὺς καρποφόρους), which have satisfied the hearts of the pagans with food (τροφῆς), the ever-present source of joy (εὐφροσύνης).

We observe immediately the rare poetical forms and literary devices used in this passage: οὐκ ἀμαρτύρον, ἀγαθοεργῶν, οὐρανόθεν, and καρποφόρους. One sees that Luke has relied on a highly sophisticated passage from which he has taken over these thoughts. Clearly that passage has to do with the witness of the gods

through the fertility cycle. Knox, as reported by Williams,⁴⁵ has indicated this to be a poor paraphrase of this passage from Xenophon:

Now, seeing that we need food (τροφῆς), think how ~~how they~~ ^(the gods) make the earth yield it, and provide to that end ~~φρονέουσιν~~ ^{φρονέουσιν} seasons which furnish in abundance the diverse things that minister not only to our wants but also to our enjoyment (εὐφραίνουσιν).

Truly these things too show loving-kindness.

Think again of their precious gift of water (ὕδωρ), that aids the earth and the seasons to give birth and increase to all things useful to us and itself helps to nourish our bodies, and mingling with all that sustains us, makes it more digestible, more wholesome, and more palatable: and how, because we need so much of it, they supply it without sting.⁴⁶

Here Socrates is arguing in favor of providence from the fact that man's need of food has been met by the provision of the fruits of the earth and the suitable seasons which provide not only what we need but also what gladdens us. But this is poor paraphrase indeed, and not the most likely source. Instead, we see the common ground of religious accommodation. We recognize the source of this material to be the Old Testament, for the rainfall and harvest themes are prominent there.⁴⁷ We can see the conjunction of food and

⁴⁵Williams, pp. 171-172.

⁴⁶Xenophon, Vol. IV: Memorabilia, Oeconomicus, Symposium, and Apology (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), IV. iii. 5-6.

⁴⁷Cf. Genesis 8:22.

gladness,⁴⁸ and by comparing Luke 21:34, we see also this usage of the satisfied heart.⁴⁹ Again Luke continues this argument in Acts 17:24f.

Verse Eighteen.

This verse is the conclusion of the miracle story, which has been interrupted by the speech, and follows the thought of 14:13. Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas could hardly prevent the crowd from doing sacrifice to them, and so honoring them as gods. Dibelius thinks that this passage is the work of Luke, who has here weakened the story. He believes that the theme of apotheosis has been corrected by the author since the statement does not, in effect, follow the speech. He further suggests that the original ending of the story was different:

The crowd was probably not persuaded, but became angry and attacked the apostles.⁵⁰

There is, however, little evidence for this conclusion, and it would be very unusual for a miracle story of this type to be followed by

⁴⁸Cf. Psalm 4:7; 145:16; 147:8; Isaiah 25:6; and Ecclesiastes 9:7.

⁴⁹On this passage compare Romans 1:20 where creation bears witness to God.

⁵⁰Martin Dibelius, Studies in the Acts of the Apostles (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), pp. 20-21.

violence. Paul's sermon is clearly an interruption, but this verse was originally a part of the preceding material. There is no reason to suppose that Luke is correcting the apotheosis.

Verse Nineteen.

The verse begins a new scene, which was prepared for by Acts 14:5 and which now terminates a successful ministry to Lystra. (Barnabas is absent from the scene temporarily.) Jews come from Antioch and Iconium and persuade the crowds to turn against Christianity. Then they stone Paul and drag him from the city, believing him to be dead.

Pisidian Antioch was more than one hundred miles from Lystra; however, trade routes linked the two cities (and Iconium). In Acts, Jews already are the enemies of Christianity, who stir up trouble for the apostles virtually everywhere.

It is clear that the present situation is a mob riot, rather than a Jewish judicial proceeding. Paul himself alludes to this stoning at 2 Corinthians 11:25, and it may have been the source of his eclypsa mentioned at Galatians 6:17.

Verse Twenty.

Finally, after the mob has departed, leaving behind only his disciples, Paul gets up. He then re-enters the city to join Barnabas,

and, having recovered, journeys on to Derbe the following day. This concludes the apostolic mission to Lystra.

CONCLUSIONS

We have observed that the apostolic mission to Lystra begins with a typical, though summarized, miracle story. Luke has emphasized the severity of the cripple's illness by describing the ailment three times, which by contrast with the cure makes comprehensible the strong effect on the Lystrans. Although the elements of the miracle story are typical to the type, as may be seen from a comparison with Acts 3:2ff., its inclusion by Luke clearly parallels that episode. Luke deliberately parallels the work of Peter and Paul as heroes of the faith in order to equate the Jewish and Gentile missionary work. In this way, Peter and Paul operate as equals in apostolic authority, and thereby, Paul is empowered as an effective Christian missionary model. Further, in one respect the miracle story is not typical of its type: the healing is effected by the cripple's "faith for salvation" brought about by the preaching of Paul. In this context Luke emphasizes the healing through his use of "conversion language" making the preaching of the gospel a necessary precondition to the salvation-healing. The overall function of the miracle story, therefore, is not only to provide the occasion for the problems in the verses which follow, but also to identify an experiential base for the

Christian mission to uneducated pagans, of which the Lystrans are a typical example. As the story illustrates, a radical experiential conversion has enormous impact on the audience and leads to a general turn to Christianity by the populace. But the Christian missionary does not take credit for such conversions since the effect has been brought about by the preaching of the gospel and, as we have noted in the exegetical analysis, the power of the Holy Spirit. Verse eighteen confirms the impression miracle makes on the Lystrans, for despite the attempts of Paul and Barnabas to quell the excitement and misunderstanding of the situation, the populace is not easily persuaded to forego their attempt at sacrifice on behalf of the two men.

As indicated by verses nineteen and twenty, Lystra apparently has no Jewish population and therefore no synagogue. Paul is preaching in the open air to the general populace of the town. Luke clearly intends for this episode to be a unique presentation of the Christian message and mission. In this situation where the benefits of synagogue and Gentile sympathizers no longer exist, a new departure is made, for the present sermon differs markedly not only from the illustrations of Jewish missionary preaching through Acts, but also from the speech of Paul in chapter 13. In contrast to that occasion where Luke presents the sermon of Paul at great length, the sermon here is not presented at all. Moreover, the message of verses fifteen through seventeen is a bare, minimal sketch in which

Luke presents only the broad outlines of the message to Gentiles. However, there can be no doubt that Luke is saving this message for the speech of Paul on the Areopagus at Athens. This is confirmed by the similarity of the two messages and by the powerful, climactic nature of the Areopagus scene, in which Luke has maximized the typical message to the pagan audience. But, in both cases, the modus operandi of the message is the same: Paul begins with pagan polytheism and issues a call for a turn from vain idols to the living God of creation, who has evidenced his goodness through the gracious elements of nature. The preacher would then turn to the distinctively Christian message, the sending of Jesus with special emphasis on salvation. Although this final element is missing in the Lystra speech and barely evident in the Areopagus speech, this is not beyond the scope of Lucan theology. As Haenchen rightly concludes:

That in this assumption we are not departing from the Lucan text is proved by the formulation in verse 9: πίστευεν τῷ σωθῆναι. It presupposes that Paul has been speaking of Jesus as σωτὴρ. The reason why Luke merely hints at this and does not use the name of Jesus even in the word of healing, becomes immediately transparent when we realize the difficulty which he thus evades: a preacher who proclaims a new faith, inveighing against the old gods, could not be mistaken by his hearers for one of those very gods! But if the content of this sermon is virtually suppressed, and only the miracle put before the reader, it will not seem implausible that these pagans should take Paul and Barnabas to be (their own) gods. This of course does not really remove the contradiction in the narrative, but renders it invisible.⁵¹

⁵¹Haenchen, p. 431.

Thus, although Luke does not mention Jesus in the narrative, clearly he is presupposed by the preaching of the gospel (in verses eight through ten).

The misunderstanding of the general populace leads to the identification of Paul and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus, that is, as their own gods having descended in the likeness of men. The effect of the legend of Philemon and Baucis on the Lucan tale is a matter of debate. Although Luke may not have known Ovid's version, in which both plot and details vary considerably from the present story, undoubtedly the legend circulated widely and in various forms. As we have noted in the exegetical analysis, it seems likely that Luke may have known the Greek model and, particularly, that the local Zeus cult may have treasured this legend as one having church-founding significance. In this way the myth may have effected the present Lystra tale prior to the Lucan redaction by supplying the names of Hermes and Zeus, as the Christian legend developed into its pre-Lucan form. For, as considered below, we believe the setting-in-life for both tales to be the same: they both originated as church-founding legends explaining the beginning-point for the temple cult on the one hand, and the Lystra church, on the other. To Luke, the identification of the gods and the inclusion of Barnabas, who has been missing from the story until now, is crucial.

For only if Barnabas is Zeus is the appearance of the priest of Zeus with the sacrificial oxen conceivable, and with this the deification of the Apostles reaches its climax.⁵²

The function of the Lystra story within the context of the Christian missionary frame of reference is clear. It illustrates not so much the problem of the wonder-working missionary, who might be mistaken for a god, although this is certainly a motif of the model. Rather, it emphasizes the necessity of utilizing the prevailing superstitions and mythologies of the uneducated pagan as the starting-point for the Christian mission. In the present context, we see Paul and Barnabas turn the prevailing local legend into an absurdity by denying the notion of gods-become-men. However, they do not dismiss the local legend entirely. Instead, they transform the prevalent beliefs of the local population into a Christian missionary message by linking the salient points of the fertility cults to the basic Christian message about the one, living God of creation. Thus, in broad outline, Luke presents the method of operation for the Christian missionary in a Lystra-like situation. The Areopagus speech follows the same general pattern, drawing first on the prevailing philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans who have assembled there to hear Paul. Furthermore, we can not fail to see the polemic value of the present story in which the leaders and adherents of the local Zeus cult become

⁵²Ibid., p. 432.

worshippers of the new religion. In our discussion of this passage above, we mentioned the tension between the gods-become-men and the God-become-man. This is difficult to assess in the Lystra story, and it must be assumed as an obvious implication left to the interpretation of the reader of Acts then and now. Although such a theology would be Pauline, Luke does not hold a doctrine of pre-existence, or at least there is not evidence for it. Thus, it is difficult to claim the point as consciously Lucan.

In his commentary Haenchen undertakes an important interpretation of the Lystra episode, which relies on the legend, rather than the speech, as the focal point for Lucan theology. He begins by citing the tradition alluded to in 2 Timothy 3:10f.

you followed me in . . . the persecutions, the sufferings, which befell me in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra

as evidence of a tradition of Pauline persecution and suffering in these three towns, circulating among the Pauline congregations.

This tradition was also known to Luke, and probably formed the backbone for his account of the journey in Asia Minor. But he rightly judged that the underlying tone of suffering . . . was out of key with his own general conception. . . . it is not the power of Christ in the weakness of Paul that he portrays, but the power of the Lord in the power of his disciple. Accordingly Luke obviates the impression of negative subjection and weakness, which the flight and suffering of the missionaries might evoke, by the way in which he arranges these events.⁵³

⁵³Ibid., p. 433.

Haenchen maintains that the Lucan account of the mission to Antioch and Iconium play down the elements of suffering and persecution, so that the real suffering is the stoning at Lystra.

This time, by recounting how the 'Apostles' were taken for gods, Luke reaches a highpoint in the demonstration of apostolic powers which wholly eclipses the ensuing 'passion'. Luke has treated this story . . . with loving care, lavishing on it all the arts of his literary culture to make it vivid, impressive.⁵⁴

In this interpretation, Haenchen relies on the importance of the oratorical role of Paul as the primary element in Lucan theology.

The identification of Paul with Hermes allowed for the identification of Barnabas with Zeus, and therefore the introduction of the priest of the Zeus cult. Hence, he arrives at the conclusion:

So long as only the crowd regard the missionaries as gods, this valuation lacks official sanction. The veneration of the Christians becomes a serious matter only at the moment when the priest of Zeus is prepared to set the seal of his sacrifice on the popular homage.⁵⁵

This leads to the change in direction offered by the speech of Paul.

Since the Christian missionaries are not afraid of the comparison with the divine men of the pagan cults, now it is necessary only for them to divert self-glorification to the worship of the God of creation. Thus, the speech serves to focus on the prevention of the identification of Paul and Barnabas with false gods, rather than the development of the kerygma. All of this plays down the passion motif of the stoning of

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 434.

Paul.

Haenchen is basically correct in his interpretation of Lucan theology; however, we are more concerned to maintain a better balance between narrative and speech. Clearly the style of legend prevails throughout the episode. We have recounted for us a legend of the founding of the Christian church at Lystra, which Luke has transformed into a common, pagan preaching situation faced by the early Christian missionary. Luke has obviously altered the original legend, but primarily by constructing a speech of Paul and by making its message the summary of the entire story: the refusal to accept the glory belonging to God. The categories developed therein endeavor to bridge the pagan concept of the gods with the Judaeo-Christian one, building a common foundation from which to propagate the faith. That this legend is independent in character may be seen from the rough transitions in Acts 14:6-7 and 20.

In this episode we certainly have an example of the way in which Acts tends to commend the heroes of the Christian faith, similar to the ways in which other Jewish apologetic writers did so during the Hellenistic age. The occasion is a common apologetic opportunity which would have been familiar to the Hellenistic Jews of the time. Paul and Barnabas meet the situation in the usual way. Thus, Luke strikingly shows the contrast between the pagan worship which glorified men as deities and the worship of the living God which is far

superior to man-like gods. He also draws from the common opportunity the language for the sermon, which emphasizes the long-time ridicule which the Jews leveled against idols and men not worthy of honor.⁵⁶ As O'Neill has correctly pointed out:

It seems that he has begun to construct a story with the intention of showing both that Paul's position as a preacher was recognized by pagans, and that the recognition of his position was spoiled by their propensity to worship the creature in place of the creator.⁵⁷

However, we need not conclude, as does O'Neill, that the story has no foundation in history because Paul and Barnabas would not have been honored as gods--only as exorcists. This legend, instead, is the means by which the Lystrans preserved the origin of their congregation. O'Neill is correct in attributing the form and content of the speech to typical Diaspora propaganda.

Finally, we must not fail to note the presence of the natural revelation theme in the speech of Paul. Here His living being is revealed by the evidences of creation, the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things that are therein, and His preservation of this creation. Even the Gentiles experience this, for he gives them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with fruit and gladness. This revelation takes place in man's heart. These ideas are expanded more fully in the Areopagus speech, where three

⁵⁶O'Neill, pp. 150-151.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 151.

spheres in particular declare God's natural revelation: (a) the creation and God's maintenance of that which is created; (b) history, the lives of the nations; (c) man's absolute dependence on God for life, for being. Of these, the first has particular significance in the present context.

CHAPTER III

THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR A SERMON BASED ON ACTS 14:8-20: ELEMENTS FROM THE THEOLOGY OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR

Helmut Richard Niebuhr was born on September 3, 1894, in Wright City, Missouri. Like his father and brother, Reinhold, he became a minister of the Evangelical Synod of North America, graduating from Elmhurst College (1912) and Eden Theological Seminary (1915). Following his graduation he became pastor of a congregation in St. Louis and was ordained at the end of his first year of ministry. During this time he received the Master of Arts from Washington University. In 1919 he was invited by Eden to be a member of their faculty, an occupation which he interrupted in 1922 to undertake advanced graduate work at the Yale University Divinity School. From Yale he received both the Bachelor of Divinity (1923) and the Doctor of Philosophy (1924). Niebuhr was president of Elmhurst College for the next three years, then returned to the task of theological education at Eden (1927). In 1931 he joined the faculty at Yale as the Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, being promoted to full professor seven years later and then to Director of Graduate Studies in Religion (1953). The next year he was named Sterling Professor of Theology and Christian Ethics, the position which he held at the time of his death

on July 5, 1962.

Unfortunately, Niebuhr died just as he was beginning his magnum opus, which would have contained a systematic discussion of his theology and ethics. Therefore, one must assemble his theology from his eight books and numerous other literary writings in order to form as organized a theology as possible. This task, however, ought not be of great concern, for Niebuhr did not conceive of theology and ethics as a systematic construction. Instead, he worked out the elements central to his concerns by dialoging with other thinkers about God, man, and men in their complex interrelations. In all one gathers the sense of crucial personal involvement in the presentation of his theology, which in its turn leads the way to the confessional style for his theology.

In broad outlines, it is possible to summarize Niebuhr's theology:

he was convinced of the sovereignty of God; of the lostness and sinfulness of man; and of the fact that faith in God, which brings forgiveness and justification to man, is a miraculous gift.¹

The core of his method was to raise the question of the relation between the God on whom man is absolutely dependent and the cultural context in which man finds himself. But the starting point for this

¹John D. Godsey, The Promise of H. Richard Niebuhr (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), p. 20.

discussion is a rediscovery of the greatness of God. As Niebuhr expressed it in the prologue to The Responsible Self:

I believe that man exists and moves and has his being in God; that his fundamental relation is to God. That is the starting point, not the conclusion.²

This is precisely the message which the Lucan account of the apostolic mission to Lystra brings to our ears. In the essay which follows, we attempt to isolate the basic elements extending this theological premise which provide a contemporary theological context for a sermon based on Acts 14:8-20.

THEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

From the Niebuhrian perspective the problem of greatest importance is the problem of faith. Niebuhr contends that in order to "do" theology, we cannot separate the consideration of the subjective activity of faith from the objective reality of faith: God.

Theology must attend to the God of faith if it is to understand faith no less than it must attend to faith in God if it would understand faith.³

In order to speak or think in a significant manner about God, we must

²H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 44.

³H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture with Supplementary Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1943), p. 12.

do so from the perspective of faith in him. Only those persons who participate in faith while criticizing or reflecting about it are enabled to say anything appropriate about the object of faith. Further, Niebuhr introduces a second qualification:

Because God and faith belong together the standpoint of the Christian theologian must be in the faith of the Christian community, directed toward the God of Jesus Christ. Otherwise his standpoint will be that of some other community with another faith and another god.⁴

Thus, when he discusses the dual task of theology,⁵ he stresses the theologian's participation in faith. On the one hand, the responsibility of the theologian is to develop the rational elements in faith. Niebuhr holds together reason and faith by claiming that reasoning is inherent in believing and by assigning reason the task of organizing, comparing, reflecting, criticizing, and developing hypotheses in the midst of believing. On the other hand, the theologian is responsible for the criticism of faith; he is to distinguish between the highs and lows of faith, between the genuine and spurious experiences and expressions. In both tasks, the theologian must speak as a participant in faith. Therefore, it is not surprising that Niebuhr concerns himself more

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 27.

⁵Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, pp. 11-16.

with the possibility of faith in God, rather than with his existence.⁶

The definition of faith is crucial not only to our discussion of Niebuhr's understanding of God, but also to the whole of his theology. Niebuhr understands faith as both fiducia and fidelitas.⁷ He calls it a fundamental personal attitude,

the attitude and action of confidence in, and fidelity to, certain realities as the sources of value and the objects of loyalty.⁸

Faith is trust in that which gives value to the self and loyalty to what the self values. Faith-trust is the passive aspect, consisting of personal trust or reliance on something or someone. It is understood as the dependence of a living self on a value-center or value-source, from which it derives its worth and for the sake of which it lives. This aspect of faith is expressed by praise or confessed as a creed stating the self-evident principle. The active aspect of faith--loyalty or fidelity--may be described as the commitment of the living self to something or someone.

It values the center and seeks to enhance its power and glory. It makes that center its cause for which to live and labor. In this active faith the loyal self organizes its activities and seeks to organize its world. Faith-loyalty . . . expresses itself in a

⁶Ibid., pp. 114-226.

⁷Godsey, p. 22.

⁸Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 16.

sacramentum, an oath of fealty, a vow of commitment.⁹

Thus, for Niebuhr faith is both an expression of confidence and an oath of allegiance. Further, in Christ and Culture he extends this definition within the context of the community. Both aspects of faith constitute a bond for the members of the community in the sense that to

act in faith means also to act in loyalty to all who are loyal to the same cause to which I am loyal and to which the cause is loyal.¹⁰

In this way Niebuhr preserves the corporate character of faith, seeing it as a result of the acts of trust and loyalty of the others in the community.

Although Niebuhr stops short of declaring the universality of the relations of faith,¹¹ for the most part his basic thesis is that all men live by faith. He suggests that inquiry into ourselves and into our common life leads to the conclusion that both the just and the unjust live by faith. In other words, we always rely on something we do not know or do not see, which in everyday terms is confidence in or reliance on other persons. Further, this inquiry leads to the conclusion that one aspect of this universal faith may be called religious:

⁹Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 253.

¹¹Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, pp. 22-23.

This is the faith that life is worth living, or better, the reliance on certain centers of value as able to bestow significance and worth on our existence. . . . we cannot live without a cause, without some object of devotion, some center of worth, something on which we rely for our meaning. In this sense all men have faith.¹²

Life simply implies belief in something that makes life worth living, without which one simply does not live.¹³ Every person lives for some purpose or for the glorification of a god or for the furtherance of some cause. This reasoning allows Niebuhr to equate the having of faith with the having of a god, in the sense that when

we believe that life is worth living by the same act we refer to some being which makes our life worth living. We never merely believe that life is worth living, but always think of it as made worth living by something on which we rely.¹⁴

Thus, we all have a god: whatever we rely upon that makes life worth living is our god. This, of course, rules out atheism as an acceptable alternative to faith. Further, it is clear that Niebuhr uses "god" in a restricted sense, for he is concerned only with "gods of faith," those gods on whom we depend in faith as value-centers and to whom we are loyal in faith as causes. So defined, Niebuhr limits his discussion of god-systems to three: henotheism, polytheism, and monotheism.

¹²Ibid., p. 118.

¹³Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation, p. 56.

¹⁴Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 119.

Niebuhr contends that the chief rival to monotheism is henotheism, the loyalty to one god among many, or

that social faith which makes a finite society, whether cultural or religious, the object of trust as well as of loyalty and which tends to subvert even officially monotheistic institutions, such as churches.¹⁵

It may take the form of faith in either a smaller or a larger social unit: family, tribe, sectarian community; civilization, humanity, nation. In any case, the meaning of individual life and the cause for which one lives is derived from some closed society or community.

The community is not so much his great good as the source and center of all that is good, including his own value. But the society is also his cause; its continuation, power, and glory are the unifying end of all his actions. The standard by which he judges himself and his deeds, his companions and their actions, by which he knows himself to be judged, is the standard of loyalty to the community.¹⁶

This faith may be expressed through religious beliefs and practices or through moral behavior. In the latter case, it is evidenced in the adherence to written and unwritten social laws in the sense of merit and guilt before social authority; and in the definitions of right and good.

When men's ultimate orientation is their society, when it is their value-center and cause, then the social mores can make anything right and anything wrong; then indeed conscience is the internalized voice of society or its representatives.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 26.

Society is the god, and we draw unity for our evaluations and behavior from it.

Niebuhr contends that the alternative to this is pluralism in faith and polytheism among the gods. When our faith in the closed society is shattered, then we turn to multiple centers of value and pledge our loyalty to a variety of causes or beings, whom we believe value us or from whom we can extract some recognition of value. We look to these gods for an assurance of our worth, while pursuing many interests and giving our loyalty to many causes. This pluralism corresponds to the pluralism of self and society.

What is valuable in the self is not its being in wholeness or selfhood but the activities, the knowing, creating, loving, worshipping, and directing that issue from it. It has become a bundle of functions tied together by the fibers of the body and the brain.¹⁸

Moreover, our natural, polytheistic religion frequently chooses the self as the object of devotion on which we depend for value and meaning. Selfhood, as in epicureanism or existentialism, becomes our value-center and cause. Niebuhr explains:

The most common object of devotion on which we depend for our meaning and value is the self. We tend in human life to a kind of religious Narcissism whereby we make ourselves the most admired of all beings and seek to interpret the meaning of all experiences by reference to their meaning for the central self. The self becomes the center of value and at the same time the being which is to guarantee its own life against meaninglessness, worthlessness, and the threat of frustration.¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 119.

However, Niebuhr dismisses selfhood as an adequate god, for we discover that, in fact, we rely on many things outside of the self to bring pleasure and fulfillment to our lives. Instead, we discover that we are interdependent on a variety of beings about us, which we hope will deliver us from sheer nothingness and the utter inconsequence of life. Here also we discover the tragedy of our religious life: none of these beings is universal; none can be the object of universal faith. If we put our faith in them, they bring us satisfaction only for a brief time, for as finite beings they can make only finite claims upon us. Therefore, our gods have two undesirable characteristics:

that we are divided within ourselves and socially by our religion, and that our gods are unable to save us from the ultimate frustrations of meaningless existence.²⁰

But there is still a greater tragedy of our religious lives: the twilight of the gods.²¹ We find that none of these beings on whom we rely and to whom we are loyal can supply the content or meaning to our lives continuously. Instead of satisfaction, we come to experience the void of meaninglessness. In short, all of our gods fail us.

Finally, we turn to the third form of faith--radical monotheism--and a discussion of the God of revelation.²² Niebuhr

²⁰Ibid., p. 120.

²¹Ibid., pp. 121-122.

²²The discussion here is highly selected, presenting an incomplete view of Niebuhr's understanding of God. We have chosen only those elements particularly helpful in our present discussion.

begins by identifying God as the void of meaninglessness. He is the supreme reality or ultimate value-center who slays all our false gods.

In a crucial passage, Niebuhr elaborates these ideas:

We may call it the nature of things, we may call it fate, we may call it reality. But by whatever name we call it, this law of things, this reality, this way things are, is something with which we all must reckon. We may not be able to give a name to it, calling it only the "void" out of which everything comes and to which everything returns, though that is also a name. But it is there--the last shadowy and vague reality, the secret of existence by virtue of which things come into being, are what they are, and pass away. Against it there is no defiance. This reality, the nature of things, abides when all else passes. It is the source of all things and the end of all. It surrounds our life as the great abyss into which all things plunge and as the great source whence they all come. What it is we do not know save that it is and that it is the supreme reality with which we must reckon.²³

For Niebuhr, the initial experience of faith in God is the placing of faith in the void of meaninglessness, who then is understood as the enemy of all our causes and the slayer of all our gods. We trust in and are loyal to this "void" or enemy, whom we experience as the One beyond the many, our value-source. In faith, we learn to call this last power, God. The implications of this act of faith are three-fold.

First, when we trust in and are loyal to the greatest of all causes, we

Further, we have chosen to exclude a discussion of revelation and history. We have allowed these elements only implicit value, because we believe that the present essay exposes the necessary points consistent with the purpose of this chapter.

²³Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 122.

love and find hope in this undefeatable cause. In short, God the void and the enemy becomes God the companion.

we have learned to count on it as a friend. We have learned to rely on it as a cause to which we may devote our lives, as that which will make all our lives and the lives of all things valuable even though it brings them to death.²⁴

Second, Niebuhr asks how this faith is possible. He lists a number of inevitable experiences: the struggle of reason and despair in life's meaning; the experience of frustration, the death of all things, internal division, and great social catastrophes; the spiritual element, understood as the flash of recognition of truth; the moral struggle and our confession of unworthiness. But the heart of this transition is

the concrete meeting with other men who have received this faith, and the concrete meeting with Jesus Christ.²⁵

This is the usual way (for us) in which the slayer becomes the friend. Third, the consequences of this faith involve the total person. We experience a new openness to knowledge and a change in our value-system: those values and absolutes in polytheism become relative in monotheism. Niebuhr concludes by pointing to the revolutionary characteristic of this faith:

So faith in God involves us in a permanent revolution of the mind and heart, a continuous life which opens out infinitely into ever new possibilities. It does not, therefore, afford grounds for boasting but only for simple thankfulness. It is a gift

²⁴Ibid., p. 124.

²⁵Ibid.

of God.²⁶

One of the crucial questions involved in the transition from polytheism to radical monotheism is the question of how movement from God the enemy to God the friend becomes possible. For Niebuhr, the answer is formulated as the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. As we have seen, Niebuhr conceives of this event as a revolution of mind and heart. However, as we have also seen, we are allowed this through the grace of God: "We know God only because he first knows us."²⁷ In this discussion, Niebuhr admitted that the faith-transition (from God the enemy to God the friend) involves rational absurdity. In Christ and Culture, he explains:

What is the absurd thing that comes into our moral history as existential selves, but the conviction, mediated by a life, a death, and a miracle beyond understanding, that the source and ground and government and end of all things--the power we (in our distrust and disloyalty) call fate and chance--is faithful, utterly trustworthy, utterly loyal to all that issues from it? . . . To metaphysical thinking the irrational thing is the incarnation of the infinite, the temporalizing of the absolute. But this is not the absurdity to our existential, subjective, decision-making thought. What is irrational here is the creation of faith in the faithfulness of God by the crucifixion, the betrayal of Jesus Christ, who was utterly loyal to Him.²⁸

The crux of the matter: Jesus Christ was radical in faith to God and

²⁶Ibid., p. 126.

²⁷Godsey, p. 32.

²⁸Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 254.

yet came to a disgraceful end (like us); however, faith in the God of his faith is called forth (in us). The resurrection of Jesus Christ confirms that God is faithful to the man of faith. Thus, the Niebuhrian perspective is that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (as an event in our history) converts polytheism into radical monotheism: faith in the many becomes faith in the One beyond the many, who is the ultimate reality in all history. Therefore, Niebuhr understands God as the only one Absolute to which everything is relative.

For Niebuhr, the principle of radical monotheism was the principle of being and the principle of value. God is the ultimate value-center and the principle of being itself. He is the One beyond the many, from which the many derive their being and in which they participate and exist. Expressed in terms of faith, we rely on God not only as the source of all being but also as that which brings meaning and content to ourselves and to all creation.

It is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore it is worthy of love. It is the confidence that whatever is, is good, because it exists as one thing among the many which all have their origin and their being, in the One--the principle of being which is also the principle of value.²⁹

The implications of this are clear. On the one hand, since God is the principle of being, the Absolute, God is the value-giver, who

²⁹Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 32.

dethrones the gods of our polytheism. On the other hand, God is the principle of value, with whom we are in value-relation as is all being. Thus, value is not for the self and some others like us; rather, one reverences every existent being since value is bestowed on all by God. Further, Niebuhr states radical monotheism in terms of faith-trust and faith-loyalty:

As faith reliance, radical monotheism depends absolutely and assuredly for the worth of the self on the same principle by which it has being; and since that principle is the same by which all things exist it accepts the value of whatever is. As faith loyalty, it is directed toward the principle and the realm of being as the cause for the sake of which it lives.³⁰

In all Niebuhr operates from two principles: (1) "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me;" (2) "whatever is, is good. "

Finally, we must turn to The Meaning of Revelation and expand Niebuhr's conception of divine unity, power, and goodness. Niebuhr believed that revelation required us to begin a new departure in our thought about these three attributes of God. In terms of unity, he believed that the revelations of God in Jesus Christ realized the anticipations of our hypotheses. Theoretically, we posit the One beyond the many as the one unconditioned being.

But though the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ met that expectation he fulfilled it in another manner than we anticipated, and

³⁰Ibid., p. 33.

made necessary a change in all our thinking about the unity of the world. He met us not as the one beyond the many but as the one who acts in and through all things, not as the unconditioned but as the conditioner. The oneness of the person was the oneness of a will directed toward unity of all things in our world.³¹

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ does not confirm the unity which we attribute to ourselves; rather, through revelation we experience our own disorder and our own lack of unity. But in this we also find the unity which comes to this world: the unity of life aspiring toward and impelled by an infinite purpose.

He is one who ties all our world together by meeting us in every event and requiring us to think his thoughts after him in every moment.³²

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ does come to us as one, but he demands the reformation of our thought about unity, and in us it requires integrity: singleness of mind and purity of heart.

Revelation also involves a revolution in our understanding of divine power. Our expectation of divine power is predicated on what we know strength to be like in this world, but instead we meet the manifestation of God's power in the weakness of Jesus. Indeed, God is the Lord of Heaven and Earth, experienced in the descending rain and shining sun and as being careless of the distinctions which we make between good and evil. God is the life-giving and death-dealing

³¹Niebuhr, Meaning of Revelation, p. 133.

³²Ibid., p. 134.

power. Yet in Jesus Christ, we see

the power of God over the strong of earth made evident not in the fact that he slays them, but in his making the spirit of the slain Jesus unconquerable. Death is not the manifestation of power; there is a power behind and in the power of death which is stronger than death.³³

In revelation, we discover that God exercises his power through crosses, not thrones. His power is made perfect through weakness, and therefore, is unlike the power we experience in this world.

Niebuhr considers a third revolution in our thought, which results from the experience of revelation: our thought about divine goodness. We expect divine goodness to be both intrinsic and instrumental; that is, the

gods of human devotion are in part beings who are adored for their own sakes and in part those to whom appeal is made for the protection and nurture of other intrinsic goods.³⁴

But in the moment of revelation, we encounter the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who meets us with good beyond our imaginations and shames our expectations, for we encounter the simple everyday goodness of love. Niebuhr contends that this value is the value of a person--not an idea or pattern which exists as pure activity.

We sought a good to love and were found by a good that loved us. And therewith all our religious ambitions are brought low, all our desires to be ministers of God are humbled; he is our minister. By that revelation we are convicted of having corrupted our religious life through our unquenchable desire to keep

³³Ibid., p. 136.

³⁴Ibid., p. 137.

ourselves with our love of our good in the center of the picture. Here is goodness that empties itself.³⁵

This goodness is all outgoing; it reserves nothing for itself, yet it has all things. Thus, Niebuhr was certain that our ideas of divine unity, power, and goodness needed to be rethought: the good does not define God; God defines the good.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE SERMON

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a bridge from the biblical idiom explored in the exegetical discussion to a contemporary theological context. The combination of the two discussions provide a context for a sermon based on Acts 14:8-20. It remains for us to draw some parallels between the two approaches, which actually will provide more information than can be used in one sermon.

We have noted that the starting point for Niebuhr's theology is the greatness of God, and that he proceeds to discuss God from the perspective of faith in him. Faith can not be separated from its object: God. It is clear too that the biblical passage focuses on the greatness of God, for this is the focal point of the speech of Paul. Further, although the exact use of the term "faith" in the narrative

³⁵Ibid., p. 138.

may differ from our present discussion, it would not be wrong to say that the passage calls for a faith-decision for God (through the revelation of Jesus Christ). This latter perspective is primarily implicit, not explicit. One can say, then, that one basic context for the sermon is faith in God, or the God of faith. Moreover, central to this concern is the confessional character of preaching. One preaches as a participant in faith, particularly Christian faith, and as a member of the Christian community.

If we take the call to faith as a central concern of the sermon, we then must expand faith in terms of its definition: trust in and loyalty to a value-center and value-source. Again this element may be more implicit, than explicit, for it is a part of the basic perspective. If this is expressed as a universal, then we have the additional prospect of exploring the concomitant idea of a god. Niebuhr equated the having of faith with the having of a god: a condition in which all men find themselves.

It is here that we come to the obvious parallel between the biblical passage and the Niebuhrian perspective: polytheism and monotheism. We recall that the Lucan narrative contrasts faith in the gods with faith in the One, living God. Niebuhr's theology provides the contemporary aspects of the same contrast. According to him, polytheism is the natural religion of all. The sermon therefore must confront its hearers with their basic condition of faith in

multiple centers of value, and show not only the truth of this reality but also illustrate the way in which we rely on many causes to give purpose and meaning to our lives. Moreover, the sermon must show the failure of polytheism to satisfy us. This is possible through what Niebuhr called the "tragedy of our lives" and the "twilight of our gods." The central experience to both being the void of meaninglessness.

In the alternative to polytheism is centered the focus of the sermon: radical monotheism. This constitutes the proclamation of God as the supreme reality or ultimate value-center, in whom we are to have radical faith. In this regard, the sermon needs to expose God as the opponent and slayer of all our gods, the One beyond the many. We must be careful to preserve the nature of faith as an act of grace: it is the gift of God for which we are thankful. This, of course, involves the transition from God the enemy to God the friend. We recall that the heart of this transition comes through the meeting with other men who have received this faith, and by meeting with Jesus Christ. This element provides the Christian context for the sermon, but may remain implicit as in the biblical passage. This also implies the new openness of which Niebuhr spoke: the revolution of our absolutes. Of crucial importance here is the way in which radical monotheism leads to reverence for every existent being as good. Perhaps, this is to be expressed in terms of divine unity, power, and

goodness. In all, then, a focus of the sermon is on faith, expanded in terms of a transition from polytheism to monotheism as a revolution of faith and in terms of the new directions it demands of our lives.

CHAPTER IV

AN ORDER OF WORSHIP FOR THANKSGIVING DAY

In some lectionaries Acts 14:8-18 (20) is the epistle for Thanksgiving Day; therefore, we have considered this occasion in preparing the order of worship. The order is drawn selectively from the Service of the Word section adopted by the Consultation on Church Union,¹ providing (in a limited sense) an ecumenical setting appropriate to the occasion. Some of the propers for the day have been drawn from The Methodist Hymnal² and the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. An asterisk (*) denotes the acts for which the people shall be standing.

The sermon is based on our exegesis of Acts 14:8-20 and on our discussion of the contemporary theological context offered by the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr. In this regard it is highly selectively, choosing relativity (without reference to an absolute) as a form of polytheism and emphasizing God (and particularly God as Love) as the absolute to which all things are relative. In contrast to both discussions previously prepared in this paper, the sermon follows an

¹An Order of Worship (Cincinnati: Forward Movement Publications, 1968), pp. 11-35.

²The Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1964).

independent course which raises the ethical implications of such an exegetical and theological understanding. The sermon represents the position of the author and stands (at times) in marked contrast with both Lucan and Niebuhrian theology and ethics.

The largely ethical direction of the sermon, which departs significantly from the biblical passage and from the ethical direction pursued by H. Richard Niebuhr, is not the most obvious direction for the sermon. It would have been more obvious, for example, to have pursued the polytheism - monotheism tension more directly, rather than to make this the implicit foundation for the sermon. In this regard, we believe that this theme is much overworked and abused by many contemporary preachers, who have greatly confused the issue and who have provided the ground for much negative lay reaction to such language as gods and God. Many lay persons simply turn this discussion off. So we have thought it better to make this element quite implicit and to make a fresh departure.

However, the choice of an ethical direction still continues to strike one as unusual in the context of this paper. On the one hand, we have observed that this paper thus far has ignored the subject entirely, even though at Claremont we are taught that ethics is the rightful concern of every sermon. In a sense, then, we have made up for lost time by emphasizing this element in the final section. On the other hand, we have felt the need to raise in the Lucan context

the question: given this theology, what are the ethical implications (of the gospel) for modern Christians. This is what we have tried to show in the sermon.³

³In practice, both the worship service and sermon would be heavy for the average congregation, but we have felt it consistent to follow the COCU service in its entirety.

THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP

November 28, 1974

10:00 A. M.

Thanksgiving Day

THE PREPARATION

*THE GREETING

Minister: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

People: Amen.

*PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Minister: Let us pray.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden. Cleanse and inform our hearts and minds by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may truly love you and worthily praise your holy Name, through Christ our Lord.

People: Amen.

*HYMN NO. 522 "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"

1. Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of harvest home.

2. All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto his praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

3. For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take his harvest home;
From his field shall in that day
All offenses purge away,
Give his angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In his garner evermore.

4. Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring the final harvest home;
Gather thou thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In thy presence to abide;
Come, with all thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest home.

Amen.

An Act of Penitence

*THE BIDDING

Minister: You who truly and sincerely repent of your sins,
and are in love and charity with your neighbors,
and intend to live a new life, by following the
commandments of God, and walking in his holy
ways: Draw near with faith, and make your
humble confession to almighty God, now in the
presence of his Church, that you may be recon-
ciled to him anew, through our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Let us humbly confess our sins to God our heavenly Father.

CONFESSION OF SIN

Minister and People: Almighty and gracious God, Creator and Judge of all men, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: We acknowledge and confess our many sins which we have committed by thought, word, and deed, against you and our neighbors. Have mercy upon us for the sake of your Son our Savior. Forgive us all our sins and offenses, and strengthen us by your Holy Spirit: That we may hereafter love and serve you in newness of life; to the honor and glory of your Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DECLARATION OF PARDON

Minister: Almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you all your sins, and bring you to everlasting life.

Minister and People: Amen.

People: Almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you all your sins, and bring you to everlasting life.

Minister and People: Amen.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Deuteronomy 8:1-20

All the commandment which I command you this day you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of

proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

Take heed lest you forget the LORD your God, by not keeping his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes, which I command you to this day: lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers, as at this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

ANTHEM

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

Acts 14:8-20

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting, who could not use his feet; he was a cripple from birth, who had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking; and Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and walked. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, because he was the chief speaker, they called Hermes. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the people. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out among the multitude, crying, "Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." With these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the people, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city; and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

*PSALTER NO. 607

Psalm 95:1-7; 96:9, 13 Coverdale

Minister: O come, let us sing unto the Lord;

People: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Minister: Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving;

People: and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.

Minister: For the Lord is a great God;
People: and a great King above all gods.
Minister: In his hand are all the corners of the earth;
People: and the strength of the hills is his also.
Minister: The sea is his, and he made it;
People: and his hands prepared the dry land.
Minister: O come, let us worship and fall down,
People: and kneel before the Lord our maker.
Minister: For he is the Lord our God;
People: and we are the people of his pasture, and the
sheep of his hand.
Minister: O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
People: let the whole earth stand in awe of him.
Minister: For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth;
People: and with righteousness to judge the world, and
the people with his truth.

*GLORIA PATRI NO. 792

Glory be to the Father
and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.

Amen, Amen.

*THE GOSPEL Matthew 6:25-33

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what
you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body,
what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the

body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

THE SERMON

Why Christian Morality is Relative

Our modern world has inherited from Einstein an idea that dominates much of our current thinking about right and wrong. This idea is expressed in a popular slogan: morality is relative.

To my knowledge, Professor Einstein never gave a lecture or wrote a chapter on ethics. His theories concern the nature of the physical universe, and nothing more. According to Einstein, time and space are relative. He did not suggest that human nature could be explained in exactly the same terms as ordinary nature. But once his great idea of relativity was introduced, it spilled over into fields having little to do with physics. Some interpreted the principle to mean that possibly everything is to be considered relative now. Truth is relative, meanings of words are relative, morals are relative. As the chemist Anthony Stanton noted, "The more things a man can

describe as Relative, the greater his prestige as a Modern Thinker."

This wasn't the first time that people took a scientific theory about nature and stretched it to apply to human nature as well. When Newton developed his mechanical conception of the universe, that too was immediately applied to people. If the model of the universe is a "world-machine," thought some, then surely the human animal is best understood as a machine--intricately arranged, to be sure--but solely a mechanical contraption in the final analysis. Neither Newton nor Locke made the leap from the law of gravity to the laws of human relations. But the men who succeeded them did. Likewise, when the quantum theory shook the foundations of determinism in the early part of this century, the pattern was repeated once again.

These theories from the field of physics do not prove, of course, that men function just like molecules. They were not designed as all-inclusive explanations of nature and human nature. But they nevertheless provide interesting models and stimulate our thinking about human nature. It is in this sense that I want to discuss moral relativity. I know that Einstein's theory proves nothing whatsoever about human morals. It is more successful in predicting movements of distant stars than in predicting the movements of any Hollywood star. People don't behave like planets. But relativity is one of the great motifs of our age, and it can be an exciting and useful "model" for considering morality. That model may not represent the whole

truth, but it does suggest much that is true.

I

Let me ask a very simple question now. If morality is relative, what is it relative to? Nothing can be relative all by itself. A thing which is "relative" must be related to something else, or it is not relative at all. To what is morality relative?

Some people speak of the relativity of morals as though there were no absolutes, no standards at all. This is not what Einstein meant by relativity, even in physics. For him time and space were relative, but they were relative to something. The absolute for Einstein was the velocity of light. What is the parallel absolute then for human morality?

Some would say that morals are relative to the particular culture in which one lives, that a given culture is absolute for its own members. If this is so, individuals have little freedom to pick and choose among the various parts of a moral system. Standards so express the total outlook of the culture in which they were formed that items cannot be easily abstracted for application elsewhere. To really practice the ethics of Tahiti or Samoa, one would need to take up permanent residence on these sunny, carefree isles. Bits and pieces of these ethics may become artificial, irresponsible, or absurd when transplanted to Greenwich Village or Hashbury.

Sylvanus Duvall says about sex ethics, for example, that "no known culture or tribe has been without standards for, and restrictions upon, sexual behavior. Cultures that seem lenient may in some ways be more restrictive than we are." Some cultures get along without taxes, a police force or paid government officials; they are able to live primitively sexually, as well as economically and politically. But, as Duvall says,

Most Americans are not Marquesians, Hottentots, desert nomads or even outcasts of our own culture. We live in a highly complex society. Those who expect to live as . . . Americans should observe a sex code that strengthens such values as personal responsibility, good reputation, love and family stability. The sexual standards of other cultures, or of the 'beatniks' and social bums among us who have failed to establish either personal faith or meaningful relationships, are beside the point.

To say that various moralities are relative to their own cultures is a different thing from saying that there are no moral standards. Upon examination, it appears that there are several tightly-integrated moral systems, and that there has never existed a culture without such standards.

Some people then suppose that mankind has not one idea of morality, but a thousand ideas. If moral relativity does not imply the absence of moral standards in any known culture, does it then suggest that views about what is good vary so widely from place to place that it's impossible to discover any general agreement?

According to C. S. Lewis, modern man has been so fascinated by a

few unusual customs of primitive people that he has overlooked the fact that the great civilizations have been in substantial agreement on basic moral principles. Anyone who wants to prove this for himself can do so by spending a few days in the library with the massive Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. There have been differences in emphasis, but, as Lewis says,

these have never amounted to anything like a total difference. If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks, and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own.

When was cowardice ever praised? Where was selfishness ever admired? Aren't characteristics like unselfishness and courage nearly universally endorsed? Lewis puts it this way: "In triumphant monotony of the same indispensable platitudes will meet us in culture after culture."

The mere fact that ethics is always relative to the nature of socialized man makes it inevitable that similarities will emerge. Morality is always relative to human nature, which in some ways remains the same. Morality is always relative to social groups, which means that other people must be considered. There are differences in moral views, but disagreement between cultures is never complete. There is also substantial agreement over what is right and good.

II

So far we've been thinking about morality in general. I want to speak now especially about Christian ethics. Christian morality, too, is relative in a number of ways. The absolute to which it is relative is not any particular culture. Nor do the generally-accepted principles of the world form an absolute for Christians. Yet there is an absolute to which all Christian morality is relative. That absolute is the principle of Love.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself," Jesus said. In the Sermon on the Mount, he even added, "Love your enemies." Luther said that every man should be a Christ to his neighbor. Paul recognized the centrality of love when he warned: "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

What is this thing called Christian love? Certainly the word does not mean for the Bible what it means in ordinary conversation. Joseph Fletcher says that the definition of love is a "swampy, semantic confusion." In his book Situation Ethics, Fletcher gives these seven illustrations of the way in which we use the word:

- Love #1: "See it now! Uncensored! Love in the raw!"
- Love #2: "I just love that hat. Isn't it absolutely divine?"
- Love #3: "Do you promise to love, honor, and obey?"
- Love #4: "Aw, come on--just this once--prove your love."
- Love #5: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Love #6: "I love strawberries, but they give me a rash. "

Love #7: "And Jonathan loved David. "

The word is spelled the same in each case, but one gathers from the context that the meaning of love varies widely--to say the least!

"Christian love" means genuine concern for the welfare of others. It does not necessarily involve either affection or admiration. The chief illustration of Christian love is the life of Christ. As Jesus expressed it, agape involves generous forgiveness, a willingness to accept persons who are often unacceptable, an intention to care for those who are usually uncared for. Christian love shares with both those who are lovable and those who are unlovable. Because it is a product of the will, and not of the feelings, it can even be extended to enemies. Christian love gives lavishly of itself. It may hope for a moving response, but it does not demand any return on its investment.

Besides this, what does it mean to refer to "God's love"? To the person who is lonely, it suggests that God is a Companion who never leaves us completely alone. To the person in pain or anxiety, the term suggests that God is a Comforter who understands and cares. To the person facing a moral decision, it suggests that God is a Guide who is concerned to aid and support us along the way. God's love means different things in different situations; but the cluster of things

that it means are not wholly different.

I do not know exactly what God's love means to you, though I have a general idea. I once had an experience in Cook County Hospital in Chicago which can serve as an illustration.

I was serving there as a chaplain-intern at the time. One day as I came on duty on a large ward, a woman I had never met indicated that she wanted to talk to me. It became evident as we talked that she was not concerned about herself at all--as most patients quite naturally are. She was concerned about a patient further up the ward who was fearful of death, and she wondered if I might talk with the lady and be helpful to her in some way. I was especially struck by this person's sensitivity to the feelings and problems of others because she seemed to be in considerable pain herself. She kept massaging her legs as we talked. As I asked her about herself, I learned that she had already had three operations for cancer and now had developed several other health problems. Nodules had started forming in her legs, and her leg muscles had become granulated, somewhat like rice. Her circulation was so poor that she was in constant misery. She could no longer walk.

As we talked, she asked if I would do her a favor and take a message to her husband. At first I was appalled to think that her husband wouldn't be visiting her there regularly and getting his own messages. Then she explained further. Her husband had had a stroke

two weeks earlier, and he was confined to bed in another ward of the same hospital. "What would you like me to tell him?" I inquired.

"Tell him that I still love him," she said. "Alright. What else?"

"Just tell him that I love him."

As I carried that simple message to Ward 44 that afternoon, I felt almost as though I were re-enacting a parable. I found her husband nearly blind, semi-paralyzed, and unable to speak. In halting sentences, I explained who I was and delivered the message which I had received. I didn't know the man. To speak of anything else at such a moment would have been trivial. He wept copiously at my words. I sat there in silence with him, my hand on his arm, for about ten minutes--one of the longest and most profound ten minutes of my life. Precisely what had these words meant to him? Was this a message of comfort, a word of forgiveness, a loving reminder of former and better days? I had no idea then that a message of love could be so difficult to give and so painful to receive. Even so, it seemed to me better that the words were spoken than left unspoken. I don't know exactly what the words meant. At the very least, they seemed to say "someone remembers . . . and someone cares for you." It is thus with the message which comes to us about God's love.

III

There is another way in which Christian love is relative.

Our own ability to love is always directly related to the love which we have experienced. As we learn of God's compassion and forgiveness, we in turn are enabled to extend that love to others. "If God so loved us," says John, "we also ought to love one another. . . . We love because first he loved us."

A new thing happened in history when Jesus came among men. Never before was there such a demonstration of the power of love. Jesus touched off a chain-reaction of loving response that has continued, in some places, to this day. To perform deeds of love was the primary intent of the early Church. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples," said Jesus, "if you have love for one another."

Not all of us have been so fortunate as to find this quality exemplified in the twentieth century Church. The church has often become interested in frozen creeds, or institutional administration, or half a dozen things more than the practice of loving relationships and a contagious concern for people.

John says that whoever practices genuine love is "born of God." Love is always derived from God, whether a person knows it or not, whether a person acknowledges it or not. There is no other source for this kind of loving concern. On the other hand, "he who does not love does not know God." Love is the sign of genuine faith.

Christian morality is relative to the love which we have ourselves known. It is a psychological--theological fact that we cannot pass on to others what we have not received. The amount of love we have to share is related to the amount we have already experienced in our own lives. The parable of the talents might suggest that less is expected of one who has known little love in his own life, while a great deal is expected of one who has been surrounded with love since infancy. I'm talking now about warm, accepting, forgiving relationships wherever they are found. Some have been fortunate enough to receive such understanding love from parents and friends for most of their lives. Others have known so little affection, and have had so much criticism and rejection in its place, that they can hardly love and respect themselves without the prolonged aid of a psychiatrist.

The plain fact is that through no fault or merit of our own, our ability to love is partially relative to the love we have experienced. We had no choice about our parents. We may or may not have been fortunate in our friends or our church associations. Perhaps we can learn something about love by reading the New Testament or a book like Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving. But it is most likely that growth in our capacity to love will come only through association with people who themselves appreciate the significance of love and who are themselves loving persons. Fromm says that people do not happen to love easily or naturally. Love is a skill to be learned and

practiced. Too often we Christians assemble only to pay tribute to the idea of love. The time must come when the church trains members in the practice of love, in a way that will make more difference in the world.

IV

Christian morality is relative not only to God's love and to the particular measure of that love which has somehow been channeled into individual lives. It is also relative to the culture in which the Christian finds himself. Probably there never will be a single uniform Christian morality that will fit every person and every culture in the world. Why should there be?

Christianity ought to consider such factors as history, tradition, and climate when discussing what concern for others requires in a given situation. Here are some examples of moral complexity.

--What is an Aros chief of Eastern Nigeria to do about his several wives when he becomes a Christian? Can he be a Christian and remain married to several women? Should he divorce all but one? What is to become of the wives who have been emotionally and economically dependent upon their chief if they are suddenly abandoned?

--It is said that the introduction of European clothes in tropical areas increased the death rate from pneumonia. These elaborate garments did not dry out well after the violent storms. Who is to say what kind of clothing Christians should wear?

--Martin Luther advised Phillip of Hesses to take two wives. Luther was convinced that theology must speak to contemporary problems. It seemed to him better that Phillip have two wives

than several concubines.

--Michener's story of Hawaii details some of the cultural imperialism that paraded under the guise of Christianity in days past. The moral attitudes of Hartford, Connecticut, may not be those most desperately needed in Honolulu.

What does it mean for Americans today to say that Christian morality is relative to the culture? It means, for one thing, that Christians should be engaged in solving the most pressing problems of our day. We should not be "hung up" on the important issues of bygone eras--like how to love Samaritans, how to lobby for Prohibition, what attitudes to take toward slavery. In our time, the American who is not involved in solving the problems of our nation is immoral. The person who is not urgently concerned to limit destruction in the Middle East, and to negotiate this conflict, is immoral. To be preoccupied with trivia in times like these is to be irrelevant and essentially immoral.

In these ways, at least, Christian morality is relative. It is relative to the eternal absolute of God's love. It is relative to whatever portion of that love we have been privileged to know in our lives. And it is relative to the real problems of our contemporary world. Christian love demands that we get relevant.

On this occasion, Thanksgiving Day, let us be thankful that our primary relationship in life is to the God of love. And let us be thankful for that portion of love which we have known in our lives.

And let us express our thankfulness as we are relevant in the midst of the real problems of our world. Amen.

*HYMN NO. 523 "O Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea"

1. O Lord of heaven and earth and sea,
To thee all praise and glory be!
How shall we show our love to thee,
Who givest all?
2. The golden sunshine, vernal air,
Sweet flowers, and fruit thy love declare;
When harvests ripen, thou art there,
Who givest all.
3. For peaceful homes and healthful days,
For all the blessings earth displays,
We owe thee thankfulness and praise,
Who givest all.
4. For souls redeemed, for sins forgiven,
For means of grace and hopes of heaven:
What can to thee, O Lord, be given,
Who givest all?
5. To thee, from whom we all derive
Our life, our gifts, our power to give:
O may we ever with thee live,
Who givest all!

Amen.

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH The Apostles' Creed

Minister: Let us profess before God and one another our common faith.

Minister and People: I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He

suffered under Pontius Pilate; he was crucified, died, and was buried. He went to the dead. On the third day he rose again, entered into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life eternal. Amen.

*THE PEACE

Minister: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: And with you also.

THE PRAYERS

Minister: In peace, in the peace of God from above, let us pray to the Lord:

For the peace of the whole world; and for the peace, unity, and faithful service of the churches of God in this and every land.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For all Christian people, their ministers and teachers, that by word and example they may bring many to faith and obedience in Christ.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For those in authority among the nations, and especially for the President, the Congress, and the Supreme Court of the United States, that they may govern with justice and promote peace and unity among all men.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For all on whose labor we depend, especially those whose duty brings them into danger, that

they may have courage and strength to serve the common good.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For those who seek out knowledge, and guide our thought; for those who help us laugh and play, that truth and beauty may give joy to daily life.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For all who suffer: the poor and lonely, the sick and afflicted, the tempted and the bereaved; for prisoners, and those who are oppressed, or persecuted, that they may be strengthened and delivered.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: For those who are enemies of the gospel of Christ, and who wrong their fellow men, that they may be reconciled.

People: Hear us, O Lord.

Minister: Let us commit ourselves, one with another, to our God.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Let us ask of the Lord brotherly love by the help of his Holy Spirit, and for each one of us the grace of a holy life.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Let us remember before God all who are near and dear to us, those present and those absent, that we may love and serve one another in the bond of Christ.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Let us pray for our community and nation, that in all things we may be honest and just, and free from prejudice, bitterness, strife, and fear.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Let us recall in thanksgiving those who have died in the faith. May God give them the crown of life in the day of resurrection, and judge them worthy with the righteous to enter into the joy of their Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Let us give thanks for all his servants and witnesses of times past: Abraham, the father of believers, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah and all the prophets, John the Baptist, the forerunner, Mary, the mother of our Lord, Peter and Paul and all the apostles, Stephen the first martyr and all the martyrs and saints, in every age and in every land.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: May the Lord God in his mercy give us with them hope in his salvation, and in the promise of eternal life in his Kingdom.

People: Lord, have mercy.

THE COLLECT

Minister: Heavenly Father, you have promised to hear what we ask in the name of your Son. We pray you, accept and fulfill our petitions, not as we ask in our ignorance and unworthiness, nor as we deserve in our sinfulness, but as you know and love us in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Minister and People: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Minister: As our Savior Christ has taught us, we dare to say:

Minister and People: Our Father in heaven: Holy be your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THE CONCLUSION

THE OFFERING

Minister: Let us prepare his table with the offerings of our life and labor.

THE PRESENTATION

*DOXOLOGY NO. 809

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

*HYMN NO. 35 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies:
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.
2. For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,

Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
 Sun and moon, and stars of light:
 Lord of all, to thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise.

3. For the joy of ear and eye,
 For the heart and mind's delight,
 For the mystic harmony
 Linking sense to sound and sight:
 Lord of all, to thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise.
4. For the joy of human love,
 Brother, sister, parent, child,
 Friends on earth, and friends above;
 For all gentle thoughts and mild:
 Lord of all, to thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise.
5. For thy church, that evermore
 Lifteth holy hands above,
 Offering up on every shore
 Her pure sacrifice of love:
 Lord of all, to thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise.
6. For thyself, best Gift Divine!
 To our race so freely given;
 For that great, great love of thine,
 Peace on earth, and joy in heaven:
 Lord of all, to thee we raise
 This our hymn of grateful praise.

Amen.

*THE DISMISSAL

Minister: Go out into the world in peace.
 Be strong and of good courage.
 Hold fast to what is good.
 Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing
 in the power of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation we have advanced three discussions.

First, we have presented an exegetical analysis of Acts 14:8-20, Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, in which we discussed the various elements of the passage and presented the contrast between polytheism and monotheism as the important message. Second, we have discussed selected elements from the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr to provide a contemporary theological context for a sermon based on the Lystra episode. There we observed the contrast between contemporary forms of polytheism and radical monotheism, and the many theological implications of this tension. We also observed the basic structure of Niebuhr's theology: the understanding of God as the only absolute to which all things and persons are relative. Finally, we have presented a worship service in which a sermon reflects the integration of the previous discussion, issuing in a statement which reflects the position of the author. Primarily, it seeks to trace the ethical implications of the biblical passage and of Niebuhrian theology, while following an independent theological and ethical position. In short, the paper does the preacher's work for one week (in a far more extensive way).

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